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Breaking into the Professional Art Scene

Visual Arts Program prepared Emily Adler '17 to stage her own solo exhibition, sell her first artwork before even graduating from RWU



Pieces of her unique "pinched" sculptures surround Emily Adler '17 inside the RWU ceramics studio in downtown Bristol.

July 17, 2017 | Jill Rodrigues '05

BRISTOL, R.I. – As the final weeks of classes drew to a close, Emily Adler '17 received an opportunity each artist hopes to get at some point in their career. Not only did she plan and mount her solo exhibition at an up-and-coming art gallery, she also sold her first pieces of artwork before she had even crossed the Commencement stage to receive her degrees this May.

The double major in visual arts and classics staged an impressive show at [Mint Gallery](#) in downtown Bristol, with an opening reception held late April that filled the space with well-known denizens of the professional art scene. Faculty members, local artists and art museum curators mingled elbow-to-elbow with family and friends as they discussed her oceanic-inspired sculptures crafted with her hallmark "pinched" technique, a series of abstracted grief landscapes, and a haunting installation of the Three Fates (a nod to her classical studies). From among her sea of work, several pieces sold while many more remain on display in the gallery's permanent collection.

"With this show I felt like I was introduced to the art community and not just waving to everyone outside the bubble," said Adler, a native of Baltimore, Md. "I gained a lot of respect from the local artists' community and confidence in my own art. I feel like I will make it."

Adler took advantage of every opportunity the visual arts program had to offer to get her to this culminating moment of her college career. In addition to the one-on-one attention she received from all of her professors, she noted that the small class sizes allowed her classmates to build their own collaborative artists' community. She also explored creating art in the university's new studio spaces and ceramics studio at the Reynolds School and Byfield School in downtown Bristol, where professional artists have their own workshops and often stop by to offer support and critiques to the budding artists. Making art alongside local artists there, she felt "like a working adult."

But her biggest success, Adler said, was gained from the real-world skills and experiences she built in conceiving and preparing for the exhibition – something not many working artists get a chance to do, let alone as a college student. And that started with the encouragement from her visual arts professors to secure her own solo exhibit. Once she had the backing of a gallery, her professors supported and guided her in what it takes to put on an individual art show.

From creating and promoting the event to selecting and mounting her art, Adler aced her hands-on lesson on bridging the creative and entrepreneurial aspects within the professional art scene. Although she says it was the more challenging part of the project, the hours she put into networking and self-promotion paid off with a packed-room reception. But hanging the show was an opportunity to let her natural talent rise to the top.

Heeding her professors' advice over many semesters of studies, Adler designed an exhibit that "let the art breathe." A landscape of soft earth tones in peach, beige, pink and olive cascaded around the room, as she "tried to make connections between the ocean-floor sculptures placed on pedestals and up to the mountaintops" of her paintings hanging on the walls.

"Now on my résumé I can say I know how to curate and hang an art show – that's a serious skill to promote to a potential employer," Adler said. "And I learned a lot about how to use my network and promote myself."

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